

# Trotskyism and the Cuban Revolution: A Debate

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*This exchange of views on the early history of the Cuban revolution was published in the 11 May 1981 issue of Intercontinental Press. The first two pieces are open letters, one by Adolfo Gilly and the other by Angel Fanjul, written in response to a speech given by US Socialist Workers Party National Secretary Jack Barnes on 31 December 1978, which was published as "Twenty Years of the Cuban Revolution" in the 19 February 1979 issue of Intercontinental Press. The third article is a reply to Gilly and Fanjul by José G. Pérez, who was at that time a member of the SWP National Committee.*

## Open Letter to Jack Barnes on Trotskyism in Cuba

Adolfo Gilly

Dear Comrade Barnes,

The speech you gave on December 31, 1978, "Cuba - Twenty Years of Revolution", seems to me an important document, both in view of its content and because of the occasion on which it was made. I think it was appropriate that you sought to draw an objective balance sheet of the Cuban revolution and the evolution of its leadership. This included appraising the revolutionary significance of Cuba's intervention in Angola and other African countries, and pointing out that in judging the Cuban compañeros one must understand that their alliance with the Soviet Union, while indispensable, at the same time puts them under terrible pressure from the bureaucracy.

It's true, as you said, that the Cuban revolution - particularly during the crucial years from 1959 to 1962 - has been a test for all revolutionary tendencies, including tendencies in the Trotskyist movement. I thought that your summary of the activity in defense of the revolution carried out by Trotskyists in the United States during those years was impressive. The Latin American Trotskyist movement, which was then organized mostly in the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, did no less. (In fact we did a few more things that we were able to do because of our situation.)

I think, therefore, it would be of interest to apply the test you talked about to the positions and activity of all the tendencies in the Trotskyist movement at that time, those in the International Secretariat as well as those in the International Committee, not only in the United States but in other countries as well, including the countries of Latin America.

(At that time there was no "Posadista" tendency because that split took place in the beginning of 1962. In those days Posadas considered himself a "Pabloist". Furthermore, he was not by any means saying the kind of crazy things he came up with in later years, since he was subject to the control, the influence, and the political life of what was then the Fourth International-IS.)

The history of our movement is important. It's in that history - not in some abstractions - that our program lives on, and our young comrades find a source of confidence and education in party work. Throughout our history, experience has taught that none of the tendencies into which the movement has been politically or organizationally divided since the Second World Congress (1948) has a monopoly on Trotskyist principles and traditions, nor on the movement's achievements or its mistakes. (This doesn't mean, of course, that all these tendencies are the same.)

History is an indispensable tool for the development of our cadres. One thing we've learned from the likes of Stalin, Healy (whom I trust you know well), and Posadas (whom I know well), is that you can't build for the future by slandering or distorting the past. It's bad enough to do such a thing out of ignorance or carelessness. But it's even worse when done in the service of immediate political interests of a faction, sect, or clique, as was the case with those individuals.

The tradition of Trotskyism is a rich one, of tenacity in defense of principles, of the ability to stand up to long years of adversity, of devotion to revolutionary activity not just for three or five years as a student but for one's whole conscious life. Only a program that has passed all tests can provide such a continuity having had, so far, few victories and many defeats.



That continuity is embodied in men and women, in real militants. And regardless of which Trotskyist tendency they may belong to, what those militants do and have done for the revolution is something that has to be valued and respected. Otherwise our program would appear as merely some abstract truth, to be discovered by the first novice who comes along, used however and for as long as he or she may like, and then discarded in favor of some other pursuit.

The attitude of veteran comrades who whip out their past (real or invented) to score points on authority whenever younger activists speak up or contradict them is arrogant and fatuous, in my opinion. Young comrades will pay little heed to such people – and rightly so. But on the other hand it seems to me unserious for us to ignore or downplay all of the past (or the present) in which we ourselves have not participated, as if the movement only began at the point where each of us joined. If comrades come in with that sort of attitude and don't change it in the course of party life, they will not be firm in their convictions and their enthusiasm for Trotskyism won't last very long. As a rule, such people wind up becoming centrists or just dropping out of politics.

Slanders and amalgams have always been the weapons of Stalinists and centrists. Each in their own way, they use these weapons in their struggle against Trotskyism to make up for their own weakness or their lack of theoretical arguments.

This has been no less true of the Cubans, a typical current of centrist revolutionaries (whom you appraise too uncritically), who moreover have a powerful apparatus. From the writings of Blas Roca and Régis Debray up to Fidel Castro's speech at the January 1966 Tricontinental Conference – not to mention the innumerable bits of gossip spread around by paid functionaries or journalists – amalgams and slander have periodically been given free rein in their polemics. The focus of these slanders, and their intermittent character, are, to be sure, much more akin to the methods of centrists than of Stalinists. But there is no sharp division between the two. Centrists as well as Stalinists are pragmatists, who discount theory; what they believe in is the apparatus, or power.

Between 1959 and 1960 a vigorous theoretical polemic took place between the Trotskyists and Stalinists in Cuba (the latter then belonging to the PSP) over the immediate course of the revolution. The Trotskyists maintained that in order to survive the revolution had to continue, and grow over into a socialist revolution. The Stalinists said that this was an imperialist provocation to justify Yankee intervention. They maintained that the revolution was merely bourgeois-democratic. This polemic shows up in the documents of both sides during those years. We all know who was proven right by the subsequent course of the revolution and of the Castro-Guevara leadership.

But although the Stalinists lacked cogent arguments, they cooked up other things. Among these, they said that the Trotskyists were involved in pushing the idea of a march on the naval base at Guantánamo, in order to prove that the Trotskyists really were provocateurs in the service of imperialism.

The Trotskyists, like all Cubans, beginning with the revolutionary government itself, denounced the military presence of imperialism in Guantánamo and called for its expulsion, just as in our propaganda we call for the expulsion of imperialism from all of Latin America. It should not be forgotten that the recovery of Guantánamo was among the five points raised by Cuba during the October 1962 crisis.

We Trotskyists have always proposed the expulsion of imperialism from the Panama Canal, as expressed concretely in propagandistic slogans such as "Imperialism out of Panama!" or "Imperialist military bases out of Latin America!" But there remains a qualitative difference between raising these propagandistic slogans and concretely proposing to organize a march right now on the Panama Canal. It's the difference between propaganda and provocation. It was the same in the case of Guantánamo.

Furthermore, that demand was by no means the center of the Trotskyists' program. They were fighting for nationalizations, for agrarian reform, for the revolution to take a socialist course. But the Stalinists – good pragmatists that they are – didn't bother themselves with such theoretical subtleties.

Lacking arguments, they found it expedient to invent (among other slanders) the charge that the Trotskyists were running around proposing a march on Guantánamo. There are dozens of documents that show what program the Trotskyists were really fighting for, documents in which Guantánamo doesn't even appear. But of course such a fact never stood in the way of any slanderers, least of all the Stalinists. They cooked up the slander and started it rolling. Others, whose purposes it also suited, picked it up and repeated it.

And now, twenty years later, you repeat this same anti-Trotskyist slander in front of six hundred youth at the YSA Convention on the anniversary of the revolution! Unbelievable!



In your speech you said: "The world Trotskyist movement must accept the responsibility for missing two great opportunities to influence the Cuban leadership. The first was right after the victory over Batista. Unfortunately, in Cuba Trotskyism was misrepresented by a group that followed a cult leader named Juan Posadas. Their specialty was passing out leaflets demanding a march on the Guantánamo naval base, while the Cubans were trying to consolidate the revolution. They denounced the leaders of the revolution for not being socialists."

The center of your argument, in which you lay the blame on the world Trotskyist movement in general and on the Cuban Trotskyists in particular, is that their "specialty" (by which I understand main or almost exclusive activity) consisted of proposing a march on Guantánamo.

That's a lie.

The rest of your argument also collapses along with this point.

If there are documents in the SWP's files that prove what you said, I'd like to see them, and I'd be willing to correct my own view. Obviously, I can't prove a negative fact – that the Cuban Trotskyists did not have such a "specialty". That's the problem in cases like this, the same problem Trotsky faced in the Dewey hearings in Coyoacán.

But I can offer some other evidence. This includes documents of the Fourth International-IS published during those years in *Fourth International*; documents of the Latin American Bureau of the IS published in *Revista Marxista Latinoamericana* (1959); the pamphlet by Comrade Ortiz published in Cuba in 1960; and the resolution of the Sixth World Congress (December 1960) presented by Comrade Maitan, in which it is stated that Cuba was already a workers' state.

(If I'm not mistaken it was the first organization to make such a characterization, even before the Cubans themselves did. Huberman and Sweezy had said the same thing a little earlier – almost at the same time. Prior to that, Comrade Mandel and Patrice had posed the idea in the IS and, as I recall, in the discussion Comrades Maitan and Frank supported it right away.)

I can also present articles by Posadas which show what his positions were at that time. They were within the same analytical framework.

Now believe me, I have no interest whatsoever in defending the political cadaver that Juan Posadas has become, a model slanderer (as shown first of all by his slander about the death of Che). But I won't try to take him on by using his own methods.

The old Latin American Bureau (and even the later "Posadista" current, despite its monolithism) was never Posadas's one-man show (he was the one that always held that it was). Around the time of the Cuban revolution (1959-60) it was quite a substantial current, a majority of the Fourth Internationalists in Latin America at that time.

I don't deny any of the good things that have been done since by other tendencies. But there's a whole series of comrades who don't know about the past and who – whether out of pragmatism or expediency – don't take the trouble to learn about it. And I think it's time, it's high time, for those comrades to stop treating the lives, the traditions, the experience, the militant past of comrades who deserve to be respected and appreciated, like some kind of dead dog they can all join in kicking.

I should think that the documents I've mentioned constitute sufficient and abundant proof of what the position of the Fourth International and its Cuban section really was in 1960.

Comrade Barnes, you say you were there in the summer of 1960 and saw for yourself. Apparently you didn't see very clearly. I'm not criticizing you – at the time, you were barely starting to come around the Trotskyist movement and you didn't know Spanish (at least I presume so, since you say you don't know it today).

In addition to documents, I can present the testimony of Latin-American Trotskyists who were also in Cuba at that time. These were comrades who already had many years of experience in the Trotskyist movement (as many as you have now). They participated personally, as representatives of the Fourth International and its Latin American Bureau, in the Congress of Youth in Havana.

There against an overwhelming majority organized by the Stalinists in support of a democratic revolution, those comrades championed the program of a workers' and farmers' government, of expropriating the imperialists, of a



socialist revolution in Cuba, of extending the revolution. They were attacked, threatened, and slandered. But just a few days later, they were thoroughly vindicated in fact when Fidel Castro made his historic speech launching the first wave of nationalizations and opening the socialist course of the revolution.

One of these comrades is Angel Fanjul, at the time a leader of the Argentine section, who now lives in exile in Europe (and to whom I'll send a copy of this letter.)

As I recall, comrades from Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and Peru participated in that congress as representatives of the Trotskyist current. They did not mouth "insanities", as you so lightly allege. They defended the program of socialist revolution. It's in the documents.

When you were there, you saw only comrades from the United States. That's understandable, given your situation and your comprehension at the time. But what is not understandable is why you, twenty years later, as one of the main leaders of the SWP, in a speech whose importance and the scope of whose objectives could hardly be overlooked, came out making it look as if the attendance of a few Trotskyists from the United States was the only thing that saved the honor and the program of Trotskyism from the "insanities" of the Cuban and Latin American Trotskyists.

I don't know what the comrades you mentioned said, what they did, or what program they were putting forward at that time. I'm inclined to believe that their actions were quite good; I'd like to know about them in more detail. What I'm not prepared to believe, though, is your presentation of the facts.

Comrade B. Ortiz -- later a member of the International Secretariat -- also went to Cuba, and in 1961 published an article on Cuba in *Quatrième Internationale* in which he by no means preached insanities. Later, in 1961 and 1962, Comrade Juan, a member of the political bureau of the Argentine section, was sent to Cuba by the Latin American Bureau. Juan was a worker, one of the participants in the October 17, 1945, general strike in Argentina, who had been won to Trotskyism in 1946. I was also active in the Cuban section from July 1962 to October 1963 (when I was deported to Europe).

We never proposed any march on Guantánamo. On the contrary, we were extremely cautious in regard to the tactics we used to try to influence the Cuban leadership and revolutionary cadres.

I can also present one piece of material evidence. In 1963 I published a small book entitled *Inside the Cuban Revolution*. It appeared first in *Partisans and Marche*, and later in expanded form in *Monthly Review*. What I wrote there was nothing other than the positions, the analysis, and even the tactical thinking of the Cuban Trotskyists. Had I not been there with the Cuban comrades, and more importantly with the Cuban people going through the day-to-day tasks of that period, I could never have written that pamphlet. The pamphlet was favorably reviewed by *The Militant*, as I recall.

You assert that Trotskyism was "misrepresented" by the Cuban Trotskyists. You can't present a single proof of what you said. I, on the other hand, present to you this pamphlet. That should be enough. You must now tell me where and why the positions in that pamphlet "misrepresent" the ideas and the program of Trotskyism on the Cuban revolution.

Cuban Trotskyism has a long history. You don't seem to be familiar with it. I'll try to trace some of it from my own limited knowledge. It would be useful for someone to do some research on this in the archives and libraries, including the United States. According to a note that appeared on page 83 of the May 1960 issue of *Quatrième Internationale*:

"Cuba: Reconstitution of the Cuban Section of the Fourth International.

"The Partido Obrero Revolucionado (Revolutionary Workers Party, Cuban section of the Fourth International) has been reconstituted. The Trotskyist movement has long traditions in the Cuban mass movement. The Trotskyist organization in Cuba was founded in 1934, when Communist Party member Sandallo Junco returned from the USSR. Comrade Sandallo Junco was murdered by the Stalinists. The organization functioned openly until 1946, when repression was unleashed against it. Later on, some Trotskyists played an important role in the 'Action and Sabotage' section of the July 26th Movement. There they met up with other militants expelled from the Communist Party in 1949 for opposing the pro-Balasta policy, and others kicked out in 1953. The reconstituted Cuban section also included militants who have participated in the revolutionary struggle in Cuba. It will thus benefit from the real respect that exists in that country for Trotskyist ideas and traditions."



When the group was dissolved around 1947, I don't think it was because of the repression. After all, repression never breaks up any group that's not in crisis. What happened, then? As the older comrades relate it, the majority of the Cuban section came out in favor of the anti-defensist or Shachtmanite tendency, and split away after 1946 to follow this tendency, and as a result soon disappeared.

In any case, the nonexistence of organized Trotskyism in Cuba during the phase of the guerrilla struggle for power (1956-59) must be seen as the main factor accounting for the paltry influence of Trotskyism on the Cuban leadership in subsequent years.

But all was not so dark. The Trotskyists did intervene. Since there was no section, and the International was unable to help them organize one, the Trotskyist comrades just went on getting involved in the revolutionary struggle wherever and however they could. They didn't just sit around meditating, waiting to sally forth after the victory to give advice and propose an "assault on Guantánamo". The case of Pablo Díaz, who in 1947 was listed as the editor of their newspaper, was not an isolated one. The central group that reorganized the section participated in the armed struggle.

Comrade Miranda was sent by the Latin American Bureau in early 1950. She helped reorganize the group and put it back into contact with the International. Miranda was far from taking a sectarian attitude toward the July 26th Movement. She intervened in its debates, and spoke on its radio broadcasts. She was well respected by the Fidelistas.

The Cuban section began putting out a printed paper, *Voz Proletaria*, in 1960. The Stalinists launched a brutal campaign against it, all the more so since their people – following their usual tactic – had gained control over the state media. In 1961 the Trotskyists' paper was shut down. After that it continued to appear in mimeographed form. It was not clandestine; we always rejected that option. We fought for the Trotskyist tendency's right to legal existence in the workers' state. This was something far more important than our little group and its little paper. It was a question of principles, a key point of our Founding Program – the right of revolutionary tendencies to exist in a workers' state.

The comrades of the Cuban section participated on the job and in their neighborhoods in all the tasks of the revolution. They all belonged to the militia and all did voluntary work on Sundays. The section even adopted a resolution saying that no one could be a member who didn't join the militia and do voluntary work. The comrades participated in the literacy campaign, in the coffee harvest, in the cane-cutting brigades, in the Committees for Defense of the Revolution.

In 1962, during the missile crisis, all the comrades of the section were in their respective military or militia units, in the trenches or in the cities. We also placed ourselves, as an organization, at the disposal of the revolutionary government for whatever duty it might assign us. This was personally communicated to them on October 24. I understand that it was symbolic gesture, given our numerical smallness. But it was a political position we took.

On at least two occasions during the time I was in Cuba comrades were thrown in jail for periods of a month or more. And I know that more than once Che intervened on their behalf. He never would have done that if he considered them bunch of irresponsible provocateurs, as you make them out to be.

In jail the comrades' attitude was invariably one of defending the workers' state and the revolutionary government against the counterrevolutionaries with whom they were confined (and who sometimes wanted to beat them up), while at the same time defending the Trotskyist program and the party's right to legal existence again their jailers.

Nevertheless the small Cuban group was by no means perfect. It had weaknesses apart from its small size. The main weakness did not have to do with its conduct in political struggle, which was unimpeachable, nor its attitude toward the revolution, in whose tasks it participated in the front ranks. Its main problem was the theoretical weakness of the leading team, something that was unavoidable given the youthfulness of the section and its recent reorganization after the long period in which no Trotskyist party existed in Cuba.

We tried our best to overcome the failings. I know we didn't always succeed. It's probably not hard to look through the section's publications and find schema, analyses, political errors, theoretical weak points, or the sort of sectarian formulations you'd expect from a small group facing a great revolution. I don't ask anyone, nor do I try myself, to defend every single thing the comrades said or did. We're not a clique or a sect, we're a revolutionary International.

But be that as it may, one cannot find in the comrades' writings a single attack on the workers' state, a single



provocative proposal. On the contrary, one will generally find a constant preoccupation with being pedagogical and persuasive. That at least is how I remember it. I trust my memory, because it coincides with what's said in documents published abroad of which I have copies. We can probably corroborate it if we find *Voz Proletaria* in the archives.

Among the things you proposed for Cuba, you omitted the right to legal existence for revolutionary tendencies. I don't know how you envision the councils (soviets) you propose without this right. You mention the right of tendency only within the party in power, the single party. I don't know if you realize it, but when you repeat Stalinist falsehoods you are justifying – from a Trotskyist platform – the suppression of the right of the Trotskyists (and other revolutionary tendencies) to exist and function within the legality of the workers' state, to fight with our program for the revolution and as an inseparable part of the revolution.

This is the group that, according to your talk to the YSA comrades, "misrepresented" Trotskyism in Cuba in 1960.

I know two ways of "misrepresenting" revolutionary Marxism: One in its political positions, the other in the moral conduct of its militants. These generally go together, but in any case as far as I'm concerned I tend to give more weight to the second than the first. I always have.

If you believe that the Cuban comrades fit into the first of these two categories, you should demonstrate it with evidence from the documents I mentioned or others that prove what you say. If you think they were in the second category, you should cite facts, attitudes, or actions. (The Cuban Trotskyists were there in the guerrilla struggle, in the underground, and in the prisons, and they conducted themselves far better than others toward whom you seem more lenient.)

If you can prove what you said in either of these two respects, I'm willing to make the necessary corrections in my statement.

But if you don't know about either case, if what you said in Pittsburgh and now print in the February 1979 *International Socialist Review* for the SWP and the International was just, what someone told you, just your "impression", or just what you "heard said", then you know what you must do.

What I propose is that the International and the SWP, through the Cuban government or other possible means, investigate what has happened to the comrades of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (Trotskyista) of Cuba and what their present situation is. I also say you should defend the right of Trotskyists (and other revolutionary tendencies) to function legally in the workers' state.

With fraternal greetings,

Adolfo Gilly  
February 2, 1979

## The Role of the Trotskyists in the Cuban Revolution

Angel Fanjul

Dear Comrades,

I just received a copy of the letter from Comrade Adolfo Gilly to Comrade Jack Barnes regarding Barnes's December 31, 1978 speech, "Cuba – Twenty Years of Revolution".

Comrade Gilly refers to my testimony regarding the activity of the Trotskyists, and about my own activity, during the first months of the Cuban revolution. I feel politically and morally obliged to repeat that testimony, not only in view of the importance of the question posed by Gilly (it is an important question in its own right), but also for the education of the thousands and thousands of young cadres who are joining our ranks today, and because I myself was a participant in the events in question.

I speak of "repeating" the testimony because a detailed report on the Trotskyists' activity was submitted to the Latin American Bureau and to the Secretariat of the Fourth International at that time – October 1960.



While the struggle was still going on in the mountains of Cuba, while Batista still ruled the island, we Trotskyists launched a campaign in support of the guerrilla struggle in Cuba. In an article of mine published in *Voz Proletaria* (I think around the middle of 1958) entitled "Batista's Downfall is Nearing", I argued that within the July 26 Movement and in the guerrilla struggle a contradictory dynamic was unfolding, a dynamic that we Mandats should strive to define. I said that within that movement militants from petty-bourgeois tendencies fighting to humanize capitalism were coexisting with other groupings, including objectively Bolshevik elements that were looking toward a socialist solution. These were not my own ideas or predictions, but rather the predictions and conclusions shared by an entire team of Latin American Trotskyists, functioning under the leadership of the International Secretariat of that time.

While all this was going on, the Latin American Bureau of the Fourth International strained its resources in order to send two of its main leaders (Comrades Ortiz and Miranda) to Cuba to work in support of the Cuban revolution and, as an essential pivot of that support, to help build or rebuild the revolutionary Mandat party, the Cuban section of the Fourth International.

It would be wrong, however, to think that the reorganization of Cuban Trotskyism began when we arrived. A Trotskyist movement had existed for long years in Cuba and had a certain tradition. Gilly mentions some milestones in its history. So does Comrade Livio Mañan in his "Notes on the History of Trotskyism in Latin America". I refer the reader to them.

Part of the old movement survived the long, dark days of Batista's regime. But these were not isolated individuals, not fighters who had lowered their banners; they were active on several fronts. (For reasons of security, since we do not know what has happened to some of those magnificent cadres today, I will only refer to things that are public and well known in Cuba, or to persons who are no longer alive.)

There is no doubt that Trotskyism had become part of the living tradition of the Cuban proletariat, regardless of the Latin American Bureau or the International Secretariat. How could anyone forget about Meila, who fell victim to the Stalinists; Sandallo Cujas; and so many others? What about Medina, who died of tuberculosis in Batista's jails for his defense of Trotskyism?

Do comrades know that Pablo Díaz, the official editor of our paper before it was banned by Batista, was the main leader of the opposition in the Cuban trade-union organization? Or that he is one of the twelve survivors of the *Granma* who managed to get past the lines of Batista's troops and go up into the Sierra Maestra? Or that he now holds the rank of *comandante* in the Cuban Army, or that he was in charge of the operation against the armed activity of the *gusanos* in Camaguey? Do they know that Pablo Díaz was responsible for the financial apparatus of the guerrillas?

Young and old cadres alike fought in the guerrilla struggle. I remember Mirella, who was hardly more than a child, along with Juan and Idalberto Ferrara – the former a sergeant of a machine-gun squad, and the latter a medical corpsman in the guerrilla front in Oriente. There was also Comrade Antonio Torres of Havana, president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Workers. In his union paper I personally read many articles that had been taken from the Fourth International, including from *The Militant*, which in those days was in political solidarity with the International Committee.

From key posts in the class struggle all these comrades carried on an audacious struggle for the program of socialist revolution, for workers' democracy, against the bureaucracy. Other comrades, whom I cannot name but whom I know very well, worked in key positions in the campaign of urban sabotage in support of the guerrillas.

When I arrived in Cuba I was officially received by the Cuban government and given housing at the site of the Latin American Congress of Youth. There I met up with the rest of the Trotskyist delegation, which as I recall included a delegate from the Chilean POR and one other Peruvian comrade in addition to those cited by Comrade Gilly.

From the beginning we could sense the charged atmosphere that forewarned of the ordeal to come. The Stalinist apparatus was ready to resort to any means to silence the Trotskyists. As soon as we arrived we were placed aboard a train – dubbed the "Freedom Train" – along with delegates headed for the Sierra Maestra, where the Youth Congress was to be held. That trip was an unforgettable experience for me. The train stopped in each town and village, and the workers and peasants would gather around it demanding that the delegates make speeches about the Cuban revolution. Traveling on that train were Luis Naguil of Uruguay, Felipe Galván from Mexico, and myself from Argentina. We did not arrive in time for the opening of the congress because the crowds delayed the



train much longer that anticipated.

In impromptu speeches we brought greetings to the Cuban people from the International Secretariat of the Fourth International. We also argued that the socialist revolution in Cuba should go forward in a process of permanent revolution, opposing every kind of conciliation with the capitalists, and opposing the bourgeois coalition. Along with this, we called for self-organization of the workers, for workers' control, for expropriating the capitalist economy and establishing planning. We called on workers and peasants to remain active and vigilant, and constantly reminded them of what had happened in Guatemala. We urged them not to delegate power to anyone.

When we returned to Havana, the fight was already under way. The Stalinist leadership had decided to challenge our mandates and deprive us of the right to voice and vote in the congress. This was not just a conflict between the Stalinists and us; it was a conflict over the course of the Cuban revolution itself.

It was part of the class conflict in the Cuban revolution, the conflict over whether to build a bourgeois state or a workers' state. We realized that these and these alone were the two alternatives. The Latin American Youth Congress was just a pale reflection of the debate that was taking shape within the leadership of the Cuban revolution.

Faced with this, the Trotskyist delegation did not waver. We printed up three thousand copies of the manifesto we were going to present as a set of theses to the congress, and we distributed it massively to all the congress delegates. Copies were also given to the Cuban authorities, to political, trade-union, and popular organizations, and to all official and private publications.

Unfortunately, for the reasons of clandestinity that I have already explained, I do not have a copy of that manifesto. But since I was the one who edited the document, I recall its general lines. In any case, the basic points in that manifesto were excerpted and published in all the Cuban and Latin American press of the time. I refer the reader to this.

In this situation, the Stalinists could no longer quietly exclude the Trotskyists. Therefore, they tried a new scheme. I was publicly accused of being a CIA agent. Those were difficult times. The accusation was made on the front pages of all the newspapers in Cuba. They printed all our names – Naguil's name, Galván's name, my name, others. We were all CIA agents, with me heading up the list.

We were not intimidated by this. On the contrary, it only served to strengthen our conviction that it was necessary and important for us to intervene in the discussion. From then on, there was one provocation after another. A personal friend of mine from Chile, a delegate from a Christian organization in that country, expressed concern about my life – perhaps sincerely so – and offered to take me surreptitiously to the Chilean Embassy where I could seek asylum in order to avoid, as he put it, "being put up against a wall tomorrow".

We firmly rejected any idea of going underground, of asking for asylum of any kind from anyone. The Trotskyists in Cuba resolved unanimously to confront the allegations, demand a judgment, and defeat the bureaucratic maneuver. And we proposed that if we lost that battle we would fight in any ensuing trials in defense of the International, in order to defend Cuba.

This provocation was not carried out by just the Cuban Stalinist youth group. The high command of the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Western Communist parties, from Duclos to Blas Roca, was holding a conference in Havana at the same time. And that meeting – if we can take the word of *Hoy*, the daily paper of the Cuban PSP (as the Cuban Stalinist party was then called) – decided to come out in favor of the formation of an anti-oligarchical and anti-imperialist coalition government in Cuba.

The entire right wing, reformists of all shades as well as the Stalinists, had an interest in silencing the Trotskyists. We stood out as the coherent spokespersons, with a definite program, for a powerful wing within the revolutionary movement and within Cuban society that was calling for a socialist solution.

We stood up to the provocation and attended the first session of the congress. There, in the name of the entire Trotskyist delegation, I exposed the conspiracy against us and demanded the formation of a Revolutionary Tribunal to judge the revolutionary moral quality of the Trotskyists.

I made it clear that we would submit our revolutionary conduct to a review by such a tribunal, but that we would never agree that any such tribunal had the right to judge our program or our politics. Those we submitted to the judgment of the masses and to the test of history, not to any tribunal.



I also asked that if the proposed tribunal cleared us of the charges regarding our moral conduct, it should then put on trial those who had instigated, defended, and spread the slanders against us as defamers of revolutionaries, and expel them from the congress.

It was not easy to make such a presentation. When I requested to speak, the congress delegates and some of the others there stood up and drowned out my voice with shouts of "Cuba sí, Yankees no!" I estimate that the uproar against us went on for ten minutes. We did not let ourselves be shouted down, however. I held on to the microphone, starting to speak over and over again, for as long as it took to make them shut up. I was finally able to speak when it became evident that they would not be able to silence us.

I had been given five minutes to state my case. I spoke for nearly half an hour to a completely silent audience. When I finished, there was rousing applause from the galleries, in particular from the Electric Workers Union and from the Mexican Teachers group, as well as from Caribbean revolutionary groups.

The Congress president, a member of the Workers Federation of Chile, Comrade Nufiez, took the floor to call for rejection of my motion for the formation of a tribunal. He noted that I was referring to accusations and characterizations that had been made outside the congress hall, and asked if anyone among the delegates would take responsibility for the accusations that I was denouncing. If no one did, the case would be considered closed, and the congress could be considered to have confirmed that at no time had the Trotskyist delegation been attacked in word or in deed. Since no one took responsibility for the slander, that was the end of this first episode.

At dramatic moments such as this, the expressions and the words of revolutionary militants take on a special significance. I would like to cite three examples:

The peasant militia guard at the congress, when the attack against us intensified, gave me encouragement for my intervention by a single sentence: "Go on, buddy, go on!" A leader of the Cuban tobacco workers told me that if the Congress did not put a stop to this outrageous attack against us, his delegation would walk out. As he put it, they "didn't make the revolution to go back to lies". A third example is the actions of Trotskyists who were not members of the delegation. Among them was Comrade Juan Ferrara, a sergeant in the rebel army. Ferrara, dressed in his uniform, personally distributed to each delegate a statement condemning the slander. In addition, as the shouts of "Cuba sí, Yankees no" were growing louder, a very young comrade from the United States, a member of the SWP youth group, broke through the barrier separating the public from the delegates, and without saying a word took a seat right at the table of the Trotskyist delegation.

As it turned out, a sort of revolutionary tribunal was set up. It was composed of members of the July 26th Movement, the PSP, the Chomón Movement and others which I do not remember. It was presided over by the General Secretary of the CTC (Cuban Workers Federation) youth section. Two Trotskyists attended the hearing: Galván and myself. At the same time, the other Trotskyists were working incessantly, talking to the congress delegates in a number of meetings and speeches in order to beat back the Stalinist maneuver. Our "trial" lasted several hours. A Stalinist was the "prosecutor", and I the "defense attorney". In the course of the hearing it was evident that the Stalinist maneuver had been repudiated, and by a very weighty authority. A telephone call interrupted the sessions, and after that everything changed. My right to defend myself was guaranteed and respected.

My statement, on the future of the Latin American revolution and the socialist tasks of the Cuban revolution, lasted two hours. During my speech, the Stalinist "prosecutor", who had stepped out of the session temporarily, played his last card, in an obvious attempt at blackmail: they would be willing, he said, to retract their whole campaign against the Trotskyists if we would withdraw the theses we had proposed to the congress. When this proposal was made to me, it was clear that the battle had been won. My answer was clear and final. I recall its terms more or less: "Neither the power of world imperialism, nor the attacks of the Soviet bureaucracy with its falsifications and its Moscow Trials, had been able to silence the Trotskyist movement. Does the comrade 'prosecutor' think that we can be shut up by such a miserable attempt at blackmail as this? I reaffirm before this court that we will uphold, defend, and expand upon our theses so long as we are physically able to do so, and if we cannot, others will do so in our name!"

That was the end of our "trial". The president of the CTC youth stated firmly that the commission considered that there were no valid charges against the Trotskyists, and that the congress would guarantee that we would not be subjected to physical or moral attacks.

What was in those much-talked-about theses? I repeat that I do not have the text at hand, but I can say that those theses were nothing but a reiteration of the Fourth International's transitional program for Latin America. We were



fighting for the expropriation without compensation of all imperialist and Cuban-owned companies in the public interest under workers' control; for planning of the economy; for agrarian reform and agrarian revolution; for the dissolution of all organs of the bourgeois state and their replacement by a workers' and peasants' government based on freely elected workers' and peasants' councils subject to recall; for the establishment of armed workers and peasants militias; for breaking all economic, commercial, political, cultural, and military pacts that tied Cuba to world imperialism and Yankee imperialism in particular; for the right to have more than one workers party; etc.

We placed special stress on the following points:

For expulsion of the representative of the Kuomintang and the ambassador of Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist China whose presence was an insult to Cuba and for recognition of the government of People's China, which up to then had not been recognized by Cuba;

For recognition of the Algerian government in exile (comrades should recall that at that time the Algerian war of liberation was in full swing, and a government in exile had been set up, which included Ben Bella and Ben Yusef Ben Khedda);

For Cuba to denounce the Organization of American States (OAS) as an imperialist den of thieves, and to call for a Congress of Latin American Peoples, with representatives of workers' organizations and trade-union federations, political parties, youth organizations, peasants' organizations, etc., in order to constitute a permanent Assembly of the People of Latin America.

Among the points that raised the most furor, in addition to those mentioned above, was one that said precisely: "For the expulsion of the Guantanamo naval base, the spearhead of the counterrevolution!" We never called for a march on this or any other base. The Stalinists took up this sentence as the basis for another slander. Very sensitive, no doubt, the Stalinists focused on our slogans calling for expropriation of the American, British, or French-owned refineries, for collectivization of the land, etc. They knew well that the basis for class collaboration lay in defense of private property.

Our manifesto, of which we had printed only 3,000 copies, attained a circulation of hundreds of thousands. It was cited by all the Cuban press, including the essential points I have mentioned. This aroused great popular sympathy for our positions.

As would have been obvious to any observer, we knew that our theses would be rejected by an overwhelming majority. We therefore decided to separate out each of the points in the theses and present them in the form of amendments. Since our theses received only five votes – our own – that is what we did. As we proposed amendment after amendment, through the course of long sessions, the climate of the congress gradually changed. Some of our amendments were approved, by acclamation. I recall two of them: the ones on recognition of the Algerian Provisional government in exile, and on recognition of People's China.

Objectively, we changed the course of the congress. It had been expected to take two sessions, with things being approved by acclamation, without presentation of documents and without discussion. But the small Trotskyist delegation imposed a frank, open, and loyal debate. The congress was greatly prolonged; I think it lasted ten days, with lengthy, exhausting sessions. The last forty-eight hours of the congress continued without a break, and the Trotskyist delegation got no sleep. The discussion was intense, and the resolutions adopted were oriented along the lines of proletarian internationalism.

I do not claim, nor is it my intention to say, that everything we did was correct, that we did not commit errors, that things could not have been better. No doubt they could have been. But the Trotskyist delegation did the best it could. And nobody, as I recall, came forward in the name of our International to do anything better than we did.

During the congress, on the evening of August 8, 1960, the government of Fidel Castro called a new meeting in the national stadium in Havana. As members of the congress, we were invited to attend that meeting. We discussed whether or not we should accept the invitation, since in a mass meeting it would not be hard for them to carry out a new provocation against us. We talked it over and decided to go.

That was a memorable night. Fidel Castro denounced the OAS, and announced the expropriation without compensation of all the sugar refineries and the main imperialist companies. The revolution was back on its course – the course that we had been fighting for. The first workers' state in Latin America was born that night, and Trotskyists participated in its birth.



As one last note on these events, I should mention an episode that took place in the sweltering afternoon of September 2, 1960, in what was then called the Civic Plaza of Havana (now, I believe, it is the Plaza of the Revolution). There, before hundreds of thousands of people, Castro announced the breaking of all military pacts that tied Cuba to US imperialism, the expulsion of the representative of Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang, and the simultaneous recognition of People's China. I stayed in the plaza for a long time, and when I finally left people were still cheering. The proposals of the Trotskyists – which reflected the vital need for the revolution to move forward as a process of permanent revolution – had taken on material and legal form. And as Gilly well recalls, we had the privilege of being the first formally recognized Trotskyist delegation in a workers' state since the Stalinist Thermidor.

After the congress I received instructions from the International Secretariat through one of its members at that time, Comrade Juan Posadas. I was told to convey to the Cuban government the greetings, the support, and the program of action proposed by the Fourth International for international solidarity with the Cuban revolution. We did this, and in a chance meeting with Guevara, following a brief discussion, we arranged a meeting. Comrade Miranda and I attended that meeting. It was I who spoke.

Guevara thought that we were going to talk about the incident created by the Stalinists, with their miserable slander. We let him know that was not what we had in mind – since such questions are not settled in a ministry – but rather to convey to him the message and the thinking of the Secretariat of the Fourth International. The meeting had originally been scheduled to last fifteen minutes. Guevara extended it to more than two hours.

As instructed, I informed him of the International's concern, and conveyed our unconditional solidarity with the Cuban revolution (we couldn't call it a workers' state, since we had not yet resolved to characterize it that way) and with the Cuban government. I told him that we were concerned with the question of the masses organizing themselves in order to exercise power, and that we considered the crux of the problem to lie in economic planning and workers' control and administration. We stressed rather strongly the question of which social forces the defense of the Cuban revolution had to be based upon, and how important it would be from that standpoint to recognize People's China. (Note that this meeting took place at least fifteen days before September 2, 1960.)

We discussed our proposals with him rather extensively. Guevara was obviously very interested, especially in our interpretation of the Peronist mass movement, and the movements in Chile and Brazil. He discussed with us the process of workers' administration, and asked our opinion on the emerging Sino-Soviet conflict. He wanted to know about Yugoslavia. Several times Captain Manresa – his secretary – came into the office to remind him that the time had come for other meetings. Guevara ordered those appointments suspended, so that our meeting would not be interrupted. Guevara gave great importance to the judgment of the Fourth International. He followed our press attentively. Several times, during our discussion he referred to articles, from *The Militant* or *Revista Marxista Latinoamericana*.

In the course of that meeting we informed Guevara that our party was preparing to send me on another tour around Cuba, in order to organize the party and set up a branch in Guantánamo. At that point he said that they were moving toward the formation of a single party of the revolution, and that other parties would not be tolerated; but that nonetheless I could make my tour, since the government would guarantee my freedom of action.

Angel Fanjul  
February 2, 1971

## A Reply to Gilly and Fanjul: How Sectarians Misrepresented Trotskyism in Cuba

José G. Pérez *(member then of SUP National Exec-sec p-1) (unab ed.)*

On December 31, 1970, Jack Barnes, National Secretary of the US Socialist Workers Party, gave a speech celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Cuban revolution. It was one of the highlights of the eighteenth national convention of the Young Socialist Alliance.

He contrasted this anniversary to the twentieth anniversaries of the Russian and Chinese revolutions, noting that in Cuba, twenty years after its revolution, a privileged bureaucratic caste does not govern. He pointed out that there have been no purges of the original revolutionary cadre, no turning back from proletarian internationalism, and no abandoning of egalitarian domestic policies.